

JENNIFER WHITAKER

Habit

When I followed him to the river, it narrowed itself
to a needle's point—the morning clear,

the cicadas' swelling hum a comfort.
Lures spread out carnival-bright on newspaper,

those feathers trembling. The day's catch was usual:
fish too tiny left on the banks, a snake flayed open to the light.

Later, when rocks bit the backs of my knees,
the haze of insects crowding around us,

my skirt pushed back like a gasp and the water
the water a stagnant slash across the land

I didn't fight. You see, I was older now. I wasn't scared anymore;
I was tired. Back at home, I brushed my hair, put on a clean dress.

I thought it was this taking that would follow me through the halls his
fearlessness with the sky so blue and vast above us

but instead it was the field beyond the river,
those daffodils' pursed lips,
the cattails bending in the wind.